

➤ Historical Artifact ➤ #21001186

Edith Eugenie Johnson, M.D. – c.1920s Bronze Signage Memorabilia



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Description -v- Item # 21001186

A rare opportunity to own a piece of San Francisco Bay Area history. Vintage antique original 1920s EDITH JOHNSON, M.D. bronze nameplate. Acquired at an estate sale and reputed to have belonged to Edith Eugenie Johnson, M.D. (1872–1966), Cornell University alumna, Stanford University advisor, Palo Alto's first

woman doctor, “The White Angel” of the 1918 flu pandemic.

Much more biographical information a few paragraphs down, but first, the specs:

Circa 1920s antique bronze signage, cast deep-relief original solid bronze plaque, beautiful verdigris patina commensurate with age. Casting and typeface are consistent with early 20th century production. Measures 14.0 x 2.5 x 0.475 inches thick, weight is 3 lbs 7 oz . It has a pair of mounting holes which are approx 12.8 inches apart. There is some black and gray paint residue on the sides and back. Provenance unproven, sold “as-is”.

For connoisseurs and collectors of advertisements, advertising signs, rare memorabilia/collectibles, and Silicon Valley historical artifacts.

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About Dr. Edith Johnson

A renowned and celebrated physician whose lifelong service to the people of the California Bay Area is remembered and honored in the family-friendly greenspace “Dr. Edith Eugenie Johnson Park” in Palo Alto, California.

From her brother’s Foreword to Dr. Johnson’s 1954-published memoir, *Leaves from a Doctor’s Diary*: Born in Nebraska in 1873 to Danish immigrant parents, Edith Johnson grew up on a Nebraska farm, living in virtual isolation; by age eight she could hitch the team to plow or harrow or mowing machine and do a farmer’s full day’s work. [Note: FamilySearch.org lists her birth as

1872, not 1873.]

In 1908, at the age of 35, she graduated from the Cornell University School of Medicine, and, as Palo Alto's first woman doctor, practiced medicine for more than 50 years from her home office at 375 Hawthorne Ave. More than just a 'practitioner', to her patients she was Physician, Obstetrician, Midwife, Psychiatrist, Advisor and Peacemaker — there are countless instances of her advising pregnant young women on how to navigate their way forward, even physically intervening in a patient's boyfriend-fight. Her practice largely comprised of first-generation Asian and Hispanic immigrants, for more than five decades Dr. Johnson provided care regardless of ability to pay, charging low-income patients little or nothing.

In 1916 — decades before Silicon Valley's more famous innovators made The Valley what it is today — Dr. Johnson became a pioneer in the field of anesthetics by equipping her Maxwell automobile with a Heidebrink gas machine and ample supplies of nitrous oxide and oxygen. With no top and no self-starter the Maxwell became a rolling obstetrics ward and often was used by the Peninsula Hospital, which had no similar anesthesia device.

Selflessly caring for her community during the 1918 influenza pandemic earned her the moniker "the White Angel".

In 1919, she was named the acting medical advisor to the women's department of Stanford University. She never married; her oft-indigent patients her *raison d'être*.

Over a career that spanned WWI to the Cuban Missile Crisis, she

delivered more than 3500 babies in the San Francisco Bay Area, as patients from Napa to San Jose would seek her out.

She retired in the 1950s but continued to see longtime patients until seven months before her death at age 93, in 1966. In 1986 the city named a park in her honor, located at the intersection of Hawthorne and Kipling streets in Palo Alto — right across the street from the home where Dr. Johnson lived and practiced medicine for more than fifty years.

Decades ahead of the groundswell feminist movement of the 1960s and beyond, Dr. Johnson has largely been overlooked as one of the 20th century's most significant advocates of women's healthcare.

In 2018, out of more than 300 names of notable individuals submitted by the local community, Dr. Edith Eugenie Johnson was one of just six finalists considered by the Palo Alto School Board for the renaming of a pair of middle schools (the well-researched Advisory Committee report is an excellent read.)

Principal references:

- Her [FamilySearch.org](#) page.
- [School Renaming Finalists](#), Palo Alto Board of Education, *pp. 19-23*.
- [The Woman Behind the Park](#), by Fran Becque, Ph.D.

See also:

- [Dr. Edith Eugenie Johnson obituary](#)
- [Facebook: Dr. Edith Johnson Park](#)
- [Street View: 375 Hawthorne Ave](#)
- [A Park a Day: Dr. Edith Johnson Park](#)



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